INTER-DEMOCRATIC SECURITY INSTITUTIONS
AND THE SECURITY DILEMMA:
A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST MODEL OF THE EU
AND NATO AFTER THE END OF THE SOVIET UNION

Glenn Diesen
Department of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism
Macquarie University

Abstract
Realism has traditionally not devoted considerable attention to the role of ideas and institutions. Neoclassical realism can respond to this deficit by exploring their impact on the decision-makers as an intervening variable between the international distribution of power and foreign policy. Decision-makers are assessed by their aptitude to act strategically in accordance with the balance of power logic to maximize security. Ideas and institutions can both support and prevent states from acting ‘rationally’ to systemic pressures. A neoclassical realist model is developed that assesses the EU and NATO as inter-democratic security institutions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While ideas and institutions enhanced their ability to mobilize resources to absorb and engage with Eastern Europe in response to new security challenges, it also reduced their ‘rationality’ and subsequently aggravated the security dilemma with Russia.

Keywords: Neoclassical realism, Ideas, Institutions, EU, NATO, Russia

Introduction
A puzzle for realists is that some alliances persist long after the rationale for their existence has expired. It will be argued in this article that the flawed assumption of NATO’s immediate decline was ingrained in the rational actor assumption, which assumed that states always act in accordance with the balance of power logic to maximize security. Instead, following the demise of the Soviet Union, the EU and NATO evolved as ‘inter-democratic security

Author’s correspondence e-mail: glenn.diesen@mq.edu.au
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institutions’. With a power vacuum and an uncertain democratic future in Eastern Europe, both the EU and NATO posited that their mission was to advance security by promoting liberal democracy and European integration as a positive-sum game. This implied that Eastern Europe would become a stable region that would bridge the West with Russia, rather than a new frontline creating uncertainty by moving incrementally towards Russian borders.

During the Cold War, the EU provided stability mostly through economic and political cooperation, while NATO ensured military security. Their roles, however, are becoming more alike in the post-Cold War era as the EU develops its Common Security and Defense Policy to counter external security challenges, NATO depicts itself as having transformed into a political institution, while both claim to be ‘socializing actors’ by promoting and cementing liberal democratic values in Eastern Europe and beyond. The ‘inter-democratic’ format implies that they are ‘exclusive’ since membership is conditioned by a state’s possession of acceptable liberal democratic credentials and adherence to related principles. With no foreseeable prospect for Russian membership in neither of these institutions, realist theory should explain inter-democratic security institutions in terms of the impact of ideas and institutions on the security dilemma.

Revised realist explanations suggest that the West’s increased engagement in Eastern Europe constitutes expansionist policies to obtain ‘collective hegemony’ that were caused by the skewed balance of power, and thus consistent with realist theory. This article will argue that neoclassical realism can contribute further to this argument by assessing the EU and NATO as inter-democratic security institutions. This involves exploring both the structurally induced foreign policy and the ideational and institutional influence on decision-makers as an intervening variable between the international distribution of power and foreign policy. Neoclassical realism challenges the rational actor assumption in terms of states always pursuing their own interests by acting in accordance with the balance of power logic to maximize security. Ideas from classical realism explore unit-level variables that influence the rationality of states. While ideas and institutions can augment security by enhancing the ability of states to mobilize resources to respond to systemic pressures, they can also diminish the capacity of decision-makers to act strategically by diverting attention away from the balance of power logic.

This article presents a neoclassical realist model that conceptualizes these inter-democratic security institutions as expansionist collective hegemonies with reduced rationality. The theoretical assumptions in the model suggest
that power imbalances create incentives for adopting ideas and ideologies that link perpetual peace to hegemony. The paradox is that ideologies repudiating the balance of power logic by suggesting that the international anarchy can be ‘transcended’ provide ideational support for more offensive means to achieve zero-sum ends, while having a diminished capacity to maximize security when balanced. The rise of the EU and NATO as the dominant and hegemonic European institutions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union reflected the severely skewed balance of power, while the prevailing institutions and ideas that support collective hegemony were products of this distorted equilibrium.

The model developed builds on Herz’s (1950a) article ‘Idealist internationalism and the security dilemma’, and suggests that inter-democratic security institutions have followed the same idealist path as the French nationalists and Soviet communists. Four stages are identified in this model which explains inter-democratic security institutions in terms of idealist internationalism and the resulting impact on the security dilemma with Russia. First, the acceptance of idealist belief that ‘realism’ can be transcended by promoting security through the advancement of ideals as positive-sum means and ends; second, linking ideals to a unit competing for power as hegemony is deemed necessary to advance these ideals; third, accepting the need for offensive means to pursue more ‘just’ ends; fourth, the inability to compromise when eventually balanced since conflicts are viewed through a Manichean prism where perpetual peace is achieved by victory over the other.

**Neoclassical realism and the repudiation of the ‘rational actor’ assumption**

Neoclassical realism does not constitute a deviation or departure from either neorealism or classical realism, but instead builds upon core precepts and ideas from both. Neoclassical realists ‘draw upon’

the rigor and theoretical insight of the neorealism (or structural realism) of Kenneth N. Waltz, Robert Gilpin, and others without sacrificing the practical insights about foreign policy and the complexity of statecraft found in the classical realism of Hans J. Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, Arnold Wolfers, and others (Lobell, et al. 2009, p.4).

Neoclassical realism is consistent with the basic assumptions of neorealism. It recognizes that the international distribution of power creates systemic pressures that impose constraints and incentives that decision-makers must respond to strategically in order to maximize their security. It also includes ideas from classical realism by considering unit-level variables in terms of affecting the ability of decision-makers to respond to these systemic pressures.
Decision-makers are defined as those contributing to the development and implementation of a state’s policies.

Neoclassical realism adds value to neorealism because it opens the ‘black box’ by assessing decision-makers as an intervening variable between systemic pressures and foreign policy (Toje and Kunz 2012, p.5). While being consistent with the notion that power produces systemic pressures, these systemic incentives and constraints do not automatically translate into foreign policy because ‘systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and state structure’ (Rose 1998, p.152). Unit-level variables are relevant to the extent they support or ‘impede states from pursuing the types of strategies predicted by balance of power theory’ (Taliaferro et al. 2009, p.1). These unit-level variables can be domestic power competition, or as explored in this article, ideas and institutions.

Neoclassical realism addresses a gap and inconsistency in realism, the rational actor assumption. Rationality suggests that states will act according to their own interest. In realism this implies acting according to the balance of power logic in order to maximize security (Rose 1998, p.150; Rathbun 2008, p.305; Mearsheimer 2009, p.242; Kitchen 2010; Reichwein 2012; Quinn 2013). The systemic pressures created by the international distribution of power provide incentives for rationality. Acting according to the balance of power logic entails recognizing systemic pressures deriving from the international distribution of power and responding strategically with the ideal level of balancing or bandwagoning to maximize security. ‘Reduced rationality’ implies that states ‘ignore balance-of-power logic and act in non-strategic ways’, and as a result, security is impaired since ‘the system punishes them’ (Mearsheimer 2009, p.242).

Several theorists nominally associated with other variants of the realist spectrum have demonstrated inconsistency concerning the rational actor assumption. Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman (2009) argue that some realist scholars have claimed that states are rational, though it should not be considered to be a fundamental assumption of realism. Herz (1981, p.189) drew attention to the role of decision-makers by arguing that the key weakness of realists lies in uncritically ‘considering those in charge of a nation’s foreign policy “rational actors”.’ Waltz (1986, p.330), Mearsheimer (2009, p.242) and Rose (1998) argue that governments that do not act rationally by steadily failing to respond to systemic pressures will put their country in risk and possibly undermine the survival of their state. Mearsheimer (2009, p.242) aptly recognizes that ‘Waltz’s decision to eschew the rational actor assumption is an
important matter to which scholars have paid little attention’. Questioning the rationality of states complements rather than contradicts neorealism. Waltz (1979, p.202) specified that structural realism is not a foreign policy theory, but rather a theory on the incentives and limitations imposed by the international distribution of power in an anarchic system. While structural realism outlines the distribution of power and the resulting systemic pressures, it does not claim that states always act rationally and thereby maximize security.

Rational states are more capable of mitigating the security dilemma since they recognize that the system will punish excessive power accumulation. They acknowledge it to be in their interest to switch from advancing relative power when they are balanced against, and instead attempt to reach a compromise to increase mutual security (Jervis 1982). Waltz (1988 p.161) also posited that ‘the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security’. Thus, the ‘morality’ of realism is for states to act prudent (or rational) in terms of prioritizing security by accumulating an ‘appropriate amount of power’ (Waltz 1979, p.40). Status quo powers are defined as seeking ‘self-preservation and the protection of values they already possess’, while revisionist powers pursue ‘non-security expansion’ (Schweller 1996, p.92, p.99). States with reduced rationality are often revisionist since the reduced ability to recognize and respond to systemic pressures results in the continuing expansion of power. The security dilemma is therefore less manageable with less rational actors, as they maximize power instead of security, or weaken their own strategic position by not responding sufficiently to constrain other powers.

The impact from ideas and international institutions on rationality
Challenging the rational actor assumption enables an exploration of the impact of ideas and institutions on security, while remaining consistent with the core assumptions of realism. Ideas/ideologies and institutions can have a positive effect on the security dilemma to the extent they improve the ability of states to respond to the systemic pressures. Ideas and institutions can provide support to mobilize resources domestically and internationally in order to balance an adversary. However, they can also reduce rationality and aggravate the security dilemma. Ideas and ideology may limit political pluralism by establishing a narrow frame for interpreting events and shaming opposition. This is especially detrimental for ideologies propagating that realism can be ‘transcended’, as a repudiation of the balance of power logic. Similarly, international institutions can entangle a state in commitments, with cultural or material dependency encouraging over- or under-balancing. Decision-makers that do recognize the balance of power logic between competing powers may nonetheless not find it politically expedient to act on it since institutional
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solidarity and conformity to the established ideological narrative is required to retain political and professional credibility.

Figure 1: The theoretical model of ideational and institutional influence on ‘rationality’

The model in Figure 1 theorizes that international distribution of power creates systemic pressures that decision-makers must respond to in order develop a foreign policy that maximizes security. These systemic pressures also create incentives for embracing ideas and institutions that mobilize support for power ambitions, which can impede the rationality of decision-makers.

Ideologies, norms and ideas can play an important role in terms of how a security dilemma develops since they affect the capacity of states to mobilize material power domestically to carry out foreign policy. Neoclassical realism recognizes constructivist concepts in the social and ideational dimensions of politics, accepting that, in addition to material power, decision-makers may be affected by ideas, ideologies, and beliefs (Herz 1981; Kitchen 2010). The key distinction between neoclassical realism and constructivism is that neoclassical realism assumes that ideas and ideology are reflections of power and they can only assist to mitigate the security dilemma to the degree they strengthen rationality. Ideologies proposing that power competition can be transcended if ideals of liberal peace are privileged serve the purpose of augmenting hegemonic ambitions and reducing rationality.

Ideology and normative framing can enhance decision-makers’ ability to respond more persuasively to opponents, as political identities can be assigned to allies and opponents in ways that unite and enable decision-makers to mobilize resources. However, this ideological inference can also undermine rationality due to a weakened ability to recognize the systemic pressures from the international distribution of power, since allies are perceived to be ‘just like
us’ while opponents are perceived as the exact opposite. Ideas and ideologies can therefore undermine security maximization and cause conflict to the extent that they draw attention away from the primacy of power. Classical realists like Carr, Morgenthau, Butterfield, and Kennan warned that ideology and norms can produce beliefs in the inherent goodness of one’s own political system, which manifests itself as destructive ‘self-righteousness’, ‘moral crusades’, or ‘nationalist universalism’ (Booth and Wheeler 2008, p.98). Policies directed by ethics may divert attention away from the balance of power logic and cause under- or over-balancing. Institutions that priorities normative policies will either ‘be left as a weak and ineffective actor[s] unable to further the shared interests of its member states, or [they] will indulge in quixotic moral crusades - with the attendant risk of hubris leading to nemesis’ (Hyde-Price 2008, p.29).

Powerful states seek to influence the rationality of decision-makers by shaping identities and perceptions in accordance with their power interests, to encourage bandwagoning behind them and balance opponents. Herz (1981, p.187) argues that due to the importance of perceptions and misperceptions, ‘image-making’ and ‘diplomatic symbolism’ non-material factors have become a significant part of power politics. A critical aspect of a foreign policy is to promote ‘a favorable image to allies, opponents, neutrals, and last but not least, one’s own domestic audience’ (Herz 1981, p.187). Jervis (1976) also insists that decision-makers perceptions and misperceptions affect policies. Common ideology, culture, or political systems can strengthen internal cohesion in alliances through ‘ideological solidarity’ (Morgenthau 2006; Walt 1997, p.168). Exclusive security institutions dependent on external enemies therefore have incentives to promote misperceptions about the intentions of the other, and to portray them as being inferior, threatening, and the ideological opposite from ‘us’.

Institutions also impact the ability of states to respond to systemic pressures. With the increasingly prominent role of international institutions after the Cold War, realists have become more engaged in debates concerning their relevance. While offensive realists such as Mearsheimer consider international institutions to be of marginal importance, traditional and modified structural realists propose that international institutions affect international relations (Schweller and Priess 1997). Institutions reflect state interests and are therefore only as strong as states allow them to be. States will only voluntarily accept constraints on sovereignty by institutions either to form larger units of power to collectively advance relative gains against another state, or alternatively for positive-sum gain when there is a balance of power and they
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desire to maintain the status quo. Whether international security institutions aggravate or mitigate the security dilemma therefore depends on the extent they reflect the balance of power. When the discrepancy grows between an international institution and the actual distribution of power, the international system will destabilize and the prospect of conflict and war increases (Schweller and Priess 1997).

Inclusive institutions reflecting the balance of power and a desire to maintain status-quo can increase rationality by facilitating cooperation between decision-makers of various states for the purpose of managing changes in the international distribution of power and mitigating the security dilemma. Such institutions may resolve disputes at the institutional level before they escalate to military conflicts. Inclusive institutions chiefly serve the purpose of security with others by constraining member states from pursuing zero-sum gains against other members. Realism accredits the success of the United Nations to realist foundations as it reflects the balance of power by delegating privileges to the great powers that ensure their interest in preserving the system. However, inclusive institutions such as the UN or OSCE lose their significance if the balance of power is skewed, since states do not constrain themselves.

Exclusive institutions can become instruments for states to compete for power by pursuing security against others by enabling a group of states to pursue relative gains against competing powers. Exclusive institutions are more aggressive when there is an imbalance of power due to reduced costs of opportunistic expansionism. Booth and Wheeler (2008, pp.188-189) labelled the ‘Mitrany paradox’ as the phenomenon of exclusive integration projects that attempt to develop new institutional superpowers depart from functional cooperation among extant actors and instead construct fewer, larger, and less compatible entities of power. While integration is usually considered a positive-sum game, it can become a zero-sum game for states excluded from an initiative, which instigates a security dilemma. Exclusive integration initiatives can de-couple a state from its neighbors and harm its security and prosperity (Charap and Troitskiy 2013).

Institutions reduce the rationality of states if they impede the ability to balance or bandwagon according to the balance of power logic. Institutional ‘stickiness’ or entanglement caused by cultural or material dependency can induce policies to maintain ‘institutional solidarity’ even when it does not harmonize with the balance of power logic. The aforementioned institutional influence can prevent the balancing of an expansionist state or replace a state’s right to make war with a duty to make war (Herz 1942, pp.1046-1047). A powerful state will
institutionalize their power over a weaker state, and collectively they both gain privileges by increasing power over a third state. The weaker state becomes more vulnerable and develops dependency, while the competing strong state is weakened since its influence over the weak state is contained (Walt 1985, p.6). The stability provided by hegemony depends on constructing a common external threat in order for weaker states to voluntarily yield some sovereignty (Kindleberger 1986). Thus, the sustainability of this relationship has a confrontational bias since the removal of a perceived threat diminishes the privileged position of the powerful state.

A neoclassical realist model of inter-democratic security institutions and the security dilemma

The neoclassical realist model outlined in this article assumes a structurally induced foreign policy, with ideological and institutional support for hegemony that undermines the rationality of decision-makers. The genuine belief that realism can be transcended by proliferating one’s own ideals implies that security can be maximized without de-coupling these values from an entity competing for power. As a result, these ideals create incentives to employ offensive means to advance zero-sum ends, while the subsequent balancing by competing powers will be perceived in uncompromising terms as a conflict between good and bad virtues. As the competing units of power are organized according to distinctive internal characteristics in terms of religion (theocracies), race or nationality (nationalism), or the form of governance (communism / liberal democracy), rivalry for power can easily become interlinked with notions of inequality and superiority. Through an ideological prism, concepts like sovereign equality and the balance of power are deemed to be immoral and illegitimate. Peace is then not believed to be dependent on the realist assumptions of mutual constraints on all actors, but instead the prospect of perpetual peace is believed to be achievable through victory by containing / converting or defeating the ‘other’. ‘Extreme realism’ therefore ensues as ideology supports militarism and sovereign inequality to advance hegemony.

This neoclassical realist model is based on the work of the classical realist, Herz (1950a), concerning the role of ideology and institutions on the security dilemma. Herz has been widely influential in international relations theory by introducing the concept of the ‘security dilemma’. Remarkably less attention has however been devoted to his work on ideology and institutions, despite this being his main focus in terms of factors that can adversely impact the security dilemma. Herz (1950a) warned that ideologies claiming to ‘transcend realism’ would reduce rationality of decision-makers and increase
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confrontation. He also suggested that the measure of ‘human progress’ had historically not been to reduce wars by institutionalizing ‘collective security’, but rather to transfer the competition for power from smaller to larger units and thereby elevating conflicts and destruction to higher levels (Herz 1942; Herz 1950a).

Herz (1950a) drew a conceptual comparison between French nationalism and Soviet communism as ‘idealist internationalism’. They both represented liberal/idealist ideas of benevolent domestic values of human freedom being externalized as peaceful behavior in the international system, which would allow them to ‘transcend realism’ and power competition. However, instead of transcending power competition, the advancement of norms depends on and is interlinked with the accumulation of power and hegemony. This can also be referred to as a geo-ideological paradigm, which is when imbalances in the international distribution of power produce support for an ideology advocating that the survival of liberal norms essential for perpetual peace is dependent on the advancement of hegemony (Pleshakov 1994).¹ Linking such ideals to a unit competing for power and hegemony causes a return to national causes manifested by exclusion, expansionism, aggression and imperialism (Herz 1950a).

The model and hypothesis presented here suggests that the EU and NATO, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, share the structural and idealist mechanisms with this idealist internationalism. A possible compromise for mutual security had been developing as the Cold War had been declared over in 1989, and in 1990 the ‘Charter of Paris for a new Europe’ stipulated that peace in Europe would be established on the principle of ending dividing lines. However, the charter lost much of its clout and meaning the following year as the collapse of the Soviet Union greatly skewed the balance of power and removed constraints for collective hegemony by the Western bloc. Less than a month after the collapse of the Soviet Union, President Bush discursively revised the history of how the Cold War ended and the subsequent significance in the State of the Union Address: ‘By the grace of God, America won the Cold War’ and ‘the leader of the West [that] has become the leader of the world’.

Systemic incentives emerged that favored an ideology portraying NATO and the EU as geopolitically neutral and value-based institutions that rise above

¹ The ‘geo-ideological paradigm’ was initially used by Pleshakov (1994) to explain the Soviet Union’s shift from internationalism to a national cause. Here it is used more broadly by also describing inter-democratic security institutions.
power competition. The rhetoric in the West changed diametrically as ending division in Europe was no longer the key prescription for peace, but rather harmony on the continent was dependent on ensuring that Russia respected the sovereignty of Eastern Europe to freely choose membership in exclusive blocs. Concurrently, spheres of influence are not portrayed as exclusive influence cemented by bloc-politics, but instead defined as denying states the sovereignty to join ‘Europe’.

Without a post-Cold War political settlement that accommodates Russia on the continent, the ability to mitigate the security dilemma deteriorates as security institutions become a tool for power competition rather than an instrument for mitigating power competition. NATO’s enlargement and non-mandated intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999 ended the prospect for Gorbachev’s ‘Common European Home’, and the unconstrained unipolar moment further accelerated after September 11. The exclusive conception of ‘Europe’ that demotes the largest state on the continent to the only non-European European state, results in ‘European integration’ and ‘democratization’ becoming a zero-sum geopolitical project since states must choose between ‘us’ or Russia. Realist theory expects Russia to balance Western expansionism and unilateral interventionism as it recovers from the perilous 1990s, which has become evident in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and other parts of the world. When balanced and further expansion of power reduces security, rational decision-makers are expected to accept a compromise to maximize security. However, ideology conflates security maximization with power maximization as a Europe ‘united and free’, anchored in the EU and NATO, which is perceived to create sustainable peace.

Stages of idealist internationalism
The first stage of idealist internationalism is the conviction of one’s own benign and normative means and ends, which are believed to be capable of transforming the international system. After the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Western bloc following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the expectation was a consensual acceptance of their universal ideals and leadership. These movements would transcend power competition and bring about a ‘totally and radically different situation’, which would separate ‘the present evil world from the brave new world of the future’ (Herz 1950a). The French Revolution embraced the idea that with the rise of sovereign nation-states the domestic advancement of human freedom would be externalized and manifested as a harmonious international system with free, equal, and self-determining nationalities. The Bolshevik revolution envisioned that with the rise of socialism the domestic advancement of human freedom in
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A classless society would produce a harmonious and post-sovereign international system.

Similarly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became common to expect that the acceptance of liberal democratic norms would be externalized in an increasingly post-sovereign and liberal democratic international system. This new order was expected to be spearheaded by NATO and the EU, which are portrayed as a ‘force for good’ with inherently positive-sum policies since security is promoted through European integration and democratization. This shared similarities with the utopian Wilsonian expectations about the contributions of democracy to human progress in terms of ending wars. The teleology based on Immanuel Kant’s ‘Perpetual Peace’ also bore similarities to Georg Hegel’s view that the French Revolution was bringing about the ‘end of history’. Such expectations about human progress became a recurrent position in discussions and interpretations of Fukuyama’s (1989) essay on ‘the end of history’.

NATO and the EU envision their means to be benevolent by offering the prospect of membership as an incentive for democratic reforms, while the end of a democratic and stable Europe is a positive-sum game for the entire continent, including Russia. This logic is also applied to conflict management. The ‘Europeanization’ of conflict resolution suggests ‘linking the final outcome of the conflict to a certain degree of integration of the parties involved in it into European structures’ (Coppieters 2004, 13). The model implies that the possibility of membership encourages conflicting sides to make compromise, and membership as an end ensures sustainable peace by adding a tier of governance that does not divide and a shared identity.

The second stage of idealist internationalism is the recognition that power accumulation is an end by linking the survival of the ideals/norms to an entity of power. Promoting universal norms is perceived to require hegemony in order for the ideal to become attractive to other states and to marginalize alternatives presented by challengers. The French, Soviets, and NATO/EU members considered themselves to develop an international aristocratic structures as a selfless act by taking on the burden of leading the rest of the world towards universal ideals. It was deemed to be necessary and a responsibility to defend the norms, while explaining their actions as being driven by external demand. However, internationalism becomes ‘subservient

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2 This resembles Waltz (1979) comparison of the US international democratisation mission with the colonial ‘white man’s burden’ and ‘civilising missions’.
Democracies are no exceptions as the leadership will perceive it as their duty to control and dominate international institutions to defend the democratic norms from the control of the majority (Herz 1950b, p.165). The states that most vigorously advocate the virtues of democracy at the domestic level are therefore more likely to reject proposals to democratize decision-making within international institutions (Hurrell 2003, p.42). By linking democracy with Euro-Atlantic institutions, liberal democratic norms are presented as both a constitutional principle and an international hegemonic norm (Rosow 2005). The EU needs to accumulate power to promote values and in order to have an attractive appeal to states that motivates reform (Youngs 2004; Diez 2005). EU and NATO effort to develop an international system that transcends power competition is also dependent on a hegemonic position to constrain challengers such as Russia (Cooper 2007). Consequently, conflicts ensue since ‘the security dilemma is at its most vicious when commitments, strategy, or technology dictate that the only route to security lies through expansion’ (Jervis 1978, p.187).

Concerning European integration as a means for enhancing security, Mitrany (1948, p.1965) contrasted functionalism with federalism. Functionalism implies that form follows function, that is, integration should be issue-based in terms of having functional value by for example enhancing security. In contrast, by aiming to develop or preserve a pre-determined form and power structure, the basic functions of these institutions are subordinated to power consideration. During a debate on NATO enlargement, the former US Ambassador to NATO outlined a key perspective in the US: ‘NATO will not be the NATO that brings in the United States to Europe in the way that it needs to if Russia is in it’ (Taft 1997). The need to preserve the form was the point of departure rather than discussing function, as the debate focused on the need to find a new reason to exist, a raison d’état. The argument was that without an adversary NATO had to get ‘out-of-area’ or ‘out-of-business’. The notion that power and hegemony in itself was required for security was also reflected in the US National Strategy, which stipulated that ‘our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States’ (White House 2002). Waltz (2000) argues that NATO’s enlargement that excluded Russia was consistent with realist assumptions since, just like victories in great wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union left the balance of power skewed which resulted in unconstrained and offensive behavior that produces future enemies (Russia).
With the focus on form, the EU is also convinced that strengthening and preserving its dominance is a source for peace. The European Council President, van Rompuy, asserted that Euroscepticism could cause war as without the EU there would be a return to nationalism, and nationalism leads to war (Waterfield 2010). Similarly, German Chancellor Merkel proclaimed that the outbreak of war in Europe cannot be ruled out if the EU project were to unravel as a consequence of the Euro’s disintegration (Pop 2011). Others dismissed war between EU members, but rather linked power to the ability of the EU to be a ‘force for good’ beyond its borders. The former French President, Valery Giscard d’Estaing, a key architect of the rejected EU Constitution, proclaimed that ‘over the decades, the basis of the EU’s existence has changed. We've moved from seeking peace to seeking greatness’ (Rettman 2013). Tony Blair defended the EU in similar vein:

The rationale for Europe in the 21st century is stronger than it has ever been. It is essentially about power, not about peace anymore. We won't fight each other if we don't have Europe, but we will be weaker, less powerful, with less influence (Scheuermann 2013).

When extending the EU’s external governance to the ‘shared neighborhood’, the focus on form or function has contrasting effects. In the post-Soviet space the populations are deeply divided in terms of viewing Russia as the main strategic partner or the chief threat. In Moldova and Ukraine the populations are split down the middle and marginal election results determine which zero-sum policies will prevail in terms of integrating with the West or Russia. A ‘functionalist’ approach to European security suggests that harmonizing integration efforts with Russia would mitigate divisions within these states as relations with Russia are maintained, while balancing an excessively dominant Russian influence. An approach that seeks to maintain a pre-determined form, an EU-centric Europe, would effectively align the EU with anti-Russian political groups at the expense of both domestic and international security.

The EU’s Association Agreement presented Ukraine with an ultimatum and a civilizational choice of belonging either with Russia or the West (Mearsheimer 2014). The Association Agreement outlined areas of economic, political and military integration towards the EU and away from Russia, which would not be made compatible with the Russian-led Customs Union. After a combination of carrots and sticks by Russia, Ukraine walked away from the Association Agreement. Ukraine and Russia instead proposed a trilateral EU-Russia-Ukraine agreement that would harmonize tariff-levels and remove the zero-sum format.
for European integration. The European Commission President, Barroso, equated the multilateral approach to granting Russia a sphere of influence and a ‘veto’ in its relations with neighboring states: ‘When we make a bilateral deal, we don't need a trilateral agreement... the times for limited sovereignty are over in Europe’ (Marszal 2013). Instead, the Association Agreement would ‘free’ Ukraine from Russia.

An EU and NATO-centric Europe supports ‘pro-European’ political groups that aim to de-couple from Russia and marginalize the Russophone population domestically. The EU and NATO do not perceive themselves to divide Europe and promote exclusive influence, but rather believe that these institutions eliminate dividing lines and spheres of influence by uniting ‘Europe’. Condoleezza Rice explained the Cold War as a ‘zero-sum’ conflict since ‘every state was to choose sides’ (US Department of State 2008a). She contrasted this to the current situation in which ‘Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Baltic states, Slovenia, Slovakia, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, are members of NATO and Europe. The Cold War is over’ (US Department of State 2008b). From this perspective, accommodating Russia does not end divisions and spheres of influence, but would instead grant Russia a ‘veto’ in Europe which is equated to a sphere of influence. Russian proposals for harmonizing integration efforts and ending the division of Europe has thus been rejected, which includes the proposal for a new European security architecture, a EU-Russian Union for free trade and free movement of people, an inclusive energy complex, and common peacekeeping operations.

The third stage of idealist internationalism is the proposition that the presumed benign ends justify and morally compel offensive means. When the ideals are not adopted as expected and/or states do not align themselves behind the leaders of the ideals, sovereign equality is challenged and de-legitimized due to the belief that the incumbents of the old world has to be defeated to give way to the new world. Constraints on projecting power are reduced, setting the conditions for perpetual war to achieve perpetual peace. Natural law is granted precedence over legal positivism, which invites conquest and hegemony by claiming responsibility for the freedom of other peoples.

Since ideologies and norms are reflections of power, expansionist powers tend to embrace norms promoting sovereign inequality and clauses of

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3 The lack of voting rights for Russian-speakers the Baltic States is widely perceived in Moscow to have set the precedent for how a Europe without Russia would be sustained.
exceptionalism in international law, while status quo powers are inclined to support norms advocating sovereign equality and constraint. The French professed that the universal values of the revolution were to be imposed on humanity by force. Thus the French National Convention declared in 1792 that France would ‘come to the aid of all peoples who are seeking to recover their liberty’ (Herz 1950a). The Bolsheviks declared in 1917 ‘the duty to render assistance, armed, if necessary, to the fighting proletariat of the other countries’ (Herz 1950a).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO and the EU began to shed the notion of security being dependent on mutual constraints. The right and responsibility to defend liberal democratic norms and the freedom of other peoples was claimed, through an increasingly militaristic and interventionist interpretation of human security. This reflected Wilson’s justification for a shift in the US posture from a passive beacon of democracy to be emulated, to taking on an active missionary duty where the military defeat of Germany would be the ‘war to end all wars’ and make the world ‘safe for democracy’. This militaristic missionary duty has revived since ‘democracies promote war because they at times decide that the way to preserve peace is to defeat nondemocratic states and make them democratic’ (Waltz 2000: 11).

The normative position has changed diametrically to support an offensive approach to security. Europe’s violent history is no longer a reason to pursue security by constraining the use of force, but instead it creates a responsibility to enable the EU and NATO to prevent others from committing similar crimes. In Germany, the prevailing sentiment among the political class was that it had a responsibility to use force in Kosovo to ‘prevent genocide’, even without a UN mandate (Wood 2002). Former German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, stated that he had been raised on two principles: ‘never another war and never another Auschwitz’. He suggested that because of the Kosovo crisis ‘these two maxims came into conflict, and I had to give up the notion of never another war’ (Sultan 2013).

NATO enlargement and unilateral interventionism after the Cold War set the precedent for an offensive approach similar to that of earlier unconstrained victors that became expansionist and threatening while believing that they were ‘acting for the sake of peace, justice, and well-being in the world’ (Waltz 2000, p.28). Humanitarianism has become increasingly militarized and treated as synonymous to regime change, and as in the case of Libya the humanitarian intervention ended after Gadhafi was toppled irrespective of the deteriorating situation that followed. NATO’s dominant position in Europe is conceived as an
‘insurance policy’ against a possible future challenge from Russia, which the former US Secretary of State, James Baker (2002), warned might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The expert group that drafted the recommendations for NATO’s new Strategic Concept advocated that NATO should prepare for potential future conflicts with Russia ‘because Russia’s future policies toward NATO remain difficult to predict, the Allies must pursue the goal of cooperation while also guarding against the possibility that Russia could decide to move in a more adversarial direction’ (NATO 2010).

The EU has also demonstrated increasing willing to use its soft power and hard power through the CSDP for democratization and ’European integration’. Exclusive institutions establishing unilateral ‘external governance’ to disseminate norms will predictably demonstrate that with a demagogic hammer for power competition, every nail will be depicted ideologically as democracy and human rights. Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov (2007), refers to ‘instruments as “democratorship”’: ‘Let us be frank, the main criterion used to measure a nation’s level of democracy seems to be its readiness to follow in the footsteps of other countries’ policies’. EU and US support for ‘color revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine revealed that popular anti-corruption and pro-democracy demonstrations could be high-jacked by zero-sum geopolitical interests as both Ukraine and Georgia linked their ‘revolutions’ directly to NATO membership. The Russian perception of a coup d'état were considered to be validated as Yushchenko named the European Parliament the ‘godparents’ of the new Ukraine due to the support for the ‘Orange Revolution’.

The degree of intervention in the internal affairs of neighboring states reached new levels in 2013 and 2014 as the EU and US backed the toppling of the corrupt, but democratically elected, President of Ukraine. The EU and the US had from the onset sided with the protesters against the government following the rejection of the Association Agreement, and several top officials emerged in Kiev to demonstrate their solidarity with the opposition. The solidarity with Western Ukrainian political groups implied neglecting that the revolt was not supported by the Eastern regions, from Kharkov to Odessa. Support for ‘Ukraine’ also involved tacit consent for the opposition seizing government buildings and right-wing groups spearheading the violence against the government of Yanukovich.

The EU eventually claimed to promote stability by negotiating a unity government. However, when the President was unconstitutionally toppled the following day, the EU did not defend the unity government it had signed under
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or call for adherence to the constitution. Instead, EU officials flew to Kiev to boost the legitimacy of the new government and signed the political chapters of the Association Agreement that the democratically elected government had refused. The EU’s support for the new Ukrainian authorities involved denying agency and legitimacy to the Eastern regions that refused recognizing the new authorities, and denouncing their similar counter-revolutionary strategy of seizing government buildings. The narrative of a ‘democratic revolution’ has since sustained irrespective of corruption levels not lowering, the de-facto banning of the main two political parties in Eastern Ukraine, and the use of an ‘anti-terrorist’ military campaign against the Donbas region.

The last stage of idealist internationalism is reduced rationality impeding the ability to manage and mitigate security dilemma. The privileged and unconstrained position of inter-democratic security institutions is a temporary condition. Wars or the collapse of states can skew the balance of power, leaving one side unconstrained and in a position to expand their power at the expense of the security of others (Waltz 2000). However, expansionism exhausts resources and creates an incentive for others in the international system to balance. ‘The international equilibrium is broken; theory leads one to expect its restoration’ (Waltz 2000, p.30).

Rational decision-makers are expected to accept a compromise to maximize security gain when they are balanced. However, with a prevailing Manichean prism, balancing is perceived as an attempt to disrupt normative positive-sum policies in favor of a return to realpolitik. Perpetual peace is sought through victory over balancing powers as the idealist ‘opposes all the natural forces and trends which are the direct or indirect consequence of the security and power dilemma’ (Herz 1950a, p.178). Since the assigned political identities are morally dichotomous, decision-makers considering a compromise can be shamed and discredited for betraying of their virtues and undoing the foundation for sustainable peace. Waltz (2000a, p.11) questions the rationality of Western democracies in which ‘citizens of democratic states tend to think of their countries as good, aside from what they do, simply because they are democratic’. Similarly, ‘democratic states also tend to think of undemocratic states as bad, aside from what they do, simply because they are undemocratic’ (Waltz 2000, p.11). Aron argues that:

4 The Rada did not receive enough votes for impeachment, the impeachment process had not been followed, and there had been a presence of armed groups.
Idealistic diplomacy slips too often into fanaticism; it divides states into good and evil, into peace-loving and bellicose. It envisions a permanent peace by the punishment of the latter and the triumph of the former. The idealist, believing he has broken with power politics exaggerates its crimes (cited in: Schweller and Priess 1997, p.11).

The ‘Manichean trap’ suggests that dividing states into good versus evil in order to mobilize support and resources to counter an adversary will obstruct the ability to resolve a conflict though a compromise that ensures a sustainable post-conflict resolution. Wilson evoking rhetoric and imagery of an evil German empire to mobilize support for the US entering the war created a ‘Manichean trap’, as it became difficult to accept a compromise with ‘evil’ in a peace treaty. Instead, it led to support for excessively punitive conditions for surrender, which ensured that a Germany would reject the post-conflict resolution when it recovered (Junker, Hildebrand and Schroeder 1995).

The West has similarly created a Manichean trap with Russia. Competition with Russia for influence in the ‘shared neighborhood’ is consistently portrayed as a conflict between ‘European integration’ and Russian ‘spheres of influence’. Implicit in this perspective is that there are no legitimate independent role for Russia in Europe, which obscures the conceptual distinction between Russian influence and Russian spheres of influence. Russian reactions to enlargements and interventionism are perceived to confirm the importance of NATO and the EU to maintain peace, rather than de-legitimize them. George Kennan offered his prediction on NATO enlargement in 1998:

I think it is the beginning of a new Cold War... Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are - but this is just wrong (Friedman 1998).

Russia considers it necessary to its military and peacekeepers to remain in adjacent conflict regions due to the West’s averseness to accept common peacekeeping initiatives and to compromise on political solutions that accommodate all relationships. At the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, which called for elevating the role of the OSCE in European security, Russia committed itself to withdrawing its peacekeepers completely from Georgia and Moldova. However, the parallel NATO and EU enlargements diminished the potential role of the collective OSCE and the prospect of establishing a pan-European security system. The absence of multilateral alternatives led Russia to revise this withdrawal as it would merely be replaced by zero-sum initiatives (Author interview 2011). A Russian official suggested that Russia had to respond to ‘a
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...completely new reality [that] has been created since’, where the rise of unilateral and often anti-Russian approaches made the withdrawal pledge impossible to fulfil (Author interview 2011).

This had also been the lesson from the Western Balkans. In June 1999, Russia sent troops to Pristina airport unannounced to establish an independent presence to ensure that Serbia’s territorial integrity would be preserved in accordance with UN Resolution 1244, given that Russia would not receive a peacekeeping sector independent of NATO (Rutland and Dubinsky 2008: 265; Author interview 2011). These troops had to be withdrawn later, and the painful lesson learned in Kosovo was that in the absence of an equal and common security arrangement operating on the ground, the West would not honor its commitments or international law. The EU and NATO consequently lost much legitimacy in Russia due to their conduct in the Balkans. This has resulted in an unwavering stance as, for example, in Transnistria (Samokhvalov 2007). The Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 were also anchored in the firm belief that a strong military presence is required in the absence of a European security system that accommodates Russian security interests.

Russia reacted to the events in Ukraine by annexing/reuniting with Crimea to secure its Black Sea Fleet, and by supporting Eastern Ukrainian groups that repudiated the legitimacy of the new government. Instead of recognizing Russia’s actions as a reaction and critiquing it on this ground as excessive and illegitimate, the dominant narrative was that of an offensive expansionist Russia plotting to re-establish the Soviet Union, while drawing comparisons between Putin and Hitler. Diverting attention away from Russian security interests with the use of emotional rhetoric constrained political pluralism and contributed to unify the Euro-Atlantic community against Russia. However, it also had the effect of reducing the capacity to debate Russian security concerns and to reach a compromise on what Russia considers to be a red line and an existential threat.

Institutional entanglement also diminishes the rationality of EU and NATO members. Various states may perceive it as harmful to their security to overbalance Russia as this can instigate fears and aggravate the security dilemma. However, the capacity to act strategically in accordance with the balance of power logic is impaired due to institutional dependency. The EU limits political pluralism by pushing for a ‘common voice’, while NATO demands alliance ‘solidarity’. Irrespective of being highly critical of NATO’s intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, the new Eastern European conformed to the position of the alliance. Similarly, while Germany and France had been at the forefront to
critique the destabilizing potential of missile defense and subsequently acted as mediators between the US and Russia, this critique was muted once missile defense became a NATO asset. The deliberate focus on solidarity to limit political pluralism was more evident in terms of overcoming Norway’s opposition to missile defense and expression of empathy with Russian concerns. The US ambassador to Norway reported that they were pressuring the Norwegian government ‘to a minimum counter Russian misstatements and distinguish Norway’s position from Russia’s to avoid damaging alliance solidarity’ (Wikileaks 2007). When missile defense was to become a NATO asset, the US Ambassador argued that Norway had to ‘adjust to current realities’ since it would have a ‘hard time defending its position if the issue shifts to one of alliance solidarity’ (Wikileaks 2008). Following the Norwegian U-turn on missile defense, it was declared in the Norwegian Parliament that ‘it is important for the political cohesion of the alliance not to let the opposition, perhaps especially from Russia, hinder progress and feasible solutions’ (Stortinget 2012).

**Conclusion**

Realist theory suggests the distorted power equilibrium following the collapse of the Soviet Union incited expansionism due to the lack of constraints on the West. Prominent realists such as Waltz, Kennan, Walt and Mearsheimer thus cautioned against NATO and/or EU against enlargements and unilateral engagement of Eastern Europe as a power expansion that would undermine security by aggravating the security dilemma with Russia. This article explored the implicit or explicit repudiation of the rational actor assumption by various realist scholars to address the tendency of NATO and the EU to conflate power maximization with security maximization.

It has been argued here that neoclassical realism provides further theoretical implications as structural imbalances also create incentives to embrace ideas and institutions that can imperil the capacity of decision-makers to act rationally. The demise of the Soviet Union encouraged the revision of ideas by even discarding what had previously been considered conventional wisdom, notably the security benefits from embracing former adversaries in inclusive institutions. The lessons from the inclusion of France in the Concert of Europe to the embrace of Germany after the Second World War have thus been replaced by new ideas of exclusive inter-democratic security institutions ‘transcending realism’ with positive-sum policies. It is concluded that the Kantian theory of democratic peace is instrumental to and has been incorporated into power politics. Subsequently, the ideological binary world
view has been revived that again divides the continent, encourages moral crusades and obstructs compromise.

The model developed on inter-democratic security institutions and the security dilemma suggests that states harboring the intention and capacity for [collective] hegemony are structurally induced to adopt ideas that equate power expansion with perpetual peace, and to strengthen exclusive institutions that facilitates collective hegemony. The paradox presented in this model is that the inability to de-couple ideals of human freedom and progress from entities competing for power results in ‘extreme realism’, as ideals of human freedom and sustainable peace mobilizes resources in favor of more offensive means to achieve zero-sum ends. Reduced rationality also has the adverse effect of impeding the aptitude to compromise to enhance security when balanced due to the ‘Manichean trap’ and institutional entanglement that require peace through victory.

While this model largely limited itself to the theoretical assumptions for the ‘rise’ of inter-democratic security institutions, further in-depth research is needed into the inner-working of decision-making. This entails exploring the extent to which ideas and institutions limit political pluralism and marginalize ‘rational’ decisions that would have maximized security in accordance with the balance of power logic. The conflict in Ukraine can provide ample of evidence for future research based on this model as the EU and NATO engage in strong normative rhetoric that weakens the prospect of establishing a common narrative and defining shared security interests with Russia.

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